DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 418 775 PS 026 270

AUTHOR Day, Barbara; Yarbrough, Tracie
TITLE The State of Early Childhood Programs in America: Challenges for the New Millennium.
PUB DATE 1998-02-00
NOTE 18p.; Paper presented at the Forum on Early Childhood, Science, Mathematics, and Technology Education (Washington, DC, February 6-8, 1998).
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative (142)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Child Advocacy; *Child Development; Child Health; *Child Welfare; *Childhood Needs; *Early Childhood Education; Educational Development; Educational Improvement; *Educational Quality; Government Role; Poverty; Well Being; Youth Problems
IDENTIFIERS Childrens Defense Fund; Developmentally Appropriate Programs; *United States

ABSTRACT

When compared to other industrialized countries, America ranks first in many areas, including military technology and Gross Domestic Product. However, in areas related to child welfare, America does not rate so high. American youngsters are frequently placed in physical danger and many begin school ill-prepared to learn. In March 1997, the Children's Defense Fund released 20 key facts about American children which illustrate the severe problems facing the youth of America. These facts are addressed in this report in terms of how to combat the problems. The first section of the report addresses the need for early childhood education. This section argues that large investments in education must be made at the early childhood level, noting that this investment has the potential not only to properly prepare children educationally, but to address social problems such as violence and delinquency; promote good health; develop children's social, physical, emotional, and psychological development; strengthen families; and provide a safe and caring environment. The report's second section addresses barriers to high-quality experiences, including poverty, participation rates, and quality of care. The third section addresses challenges for the future, including: providing a caring environment for children; addressing standards of quality; providing developmentally appropriate practice and learning environments; safe environments; engaging children; and an integrated curriculum. Contains 22 references. (SD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 418 775

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

THE STATE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS IN AMERICA: CHALLENGES FOR THE NEW MILLENIUM

Barbara Day, Ph.D.
Professor and Chair, Curriculum and Instruction
University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill

Tracie Yarbrough, Doctoral Student
University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill

Prepared for the Forum on Early Childhood
Science, Mathematics, and Technology Education
February 6, 7, and 8, 1998
Washington, D.C.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Tracie Yarbrough
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
1

Sponsored by Project 2061 of the
American Association for the Advancement of Science
with funding from the National Science Foundation

PS 026270

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

THE STATE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS IN AMERICA: CHALLENGES FOR THE NEW MILLENIUM

Barbara Day
Tracie Yarbrough

WHERE ARE THE CHILDREN AND WHO'S MINDING THEM?

When ranked among other industrialized countries, America comes in first in many areas. Among these are military technology and exports, Gross Domestic Product, the number of millionaires and billionaires, health technology, and defense expenditures. When ranking factors related to the welfare of our children, however, America does not rate so high. In the gap between rich and poor children and in infant mortality, America ranks eighteenth; seventeenth in efforts to lift children out of poverty and in low-birth weight rates; and sixteenth in living standards among the poorest one-fifth of children. Additionally, America falls below average in math scores among forty-one countries and last in protecting our children against gun violence (Children's Defense Fund [CDF], 1997). According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, America's firearm death rates of children under fifteen are far higher than the combined rates of twenty-five other industrialized countries. Three out of every four children murdered in the twenty-six countries combined were American children (CDF, 1997).

There are a variety of events that not only place our youngsters in physical danger, but contribute to the fact that many begin school ill-prepared to learn.

According to the National Education Goals Panel (1993), several factors have placed about one-half of our youth at risk of school failure. Among these are insufficient opportunities to develop, as almost 25 percent of all mothers receive little or no prenatal care. Additionally, larger numbers of single-parent families have placed strain on the family unit, which translates into problems at school.

In March 1997, the Children's Defense Fund released twenty key facts about American children (CDF, 1997). These statistics are illustrative of the severe problems facing the youth of America, including:

- 1 in 2 will live with a single parent at some point in childhood,
- 1 in 4 is born poor,
- 1 in 4 is born to a mother who did not graduate from high school,
- 1 in 5 lives in a family receiving food stamps,
- 1 in 7 has no health insurance,
- 1 in 8 is born to a teen mother,
- 1 in 12 has a disability,
- 1 in 14 was born at low birth weight,
- 1 in 21 is born to a mother who received late or no prenatal care, and
- 1 in 25 lives with neither parent.

The Children's Defense Fund urges citizens to take action in light of these staggering facts about America's youth. Other statistics reported in the CDF Yearbook include the inexcusable fact that an American child drops out of school every eight seconds, is reported neglected or abused every ten seconds, and is arrested every fifteen seconds (CDF, 1997).

THE NEED FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

These statistics should create concern for all citizens, as the welfare of our children impacts the future for all. Something must be done to protect our youth from such misfortune. In order to combat such problems, large investments in education must be made, particularly at the early childhood level. A strong education in the early years can have a dramatic effect on a child's life and well being. Experts in early childhood education tell us that " in the first three years of life, children learn, or fail to learn, how to get along with others, how to resolve disputes peaceably, how to use language as a tool of learning and persuasion, and how to explore the world without fear" (CDF, 1997). Additionally, brain research reveals that most of the connections that will be maintained throughout life are formed during childhood (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). The Packard Foundation reported that children who participate in high quality programs in the early years are less likely to need remedial education later on and are less likely to participate in acts of juvenile delinquency (CDF, 1997).

Probably the most notable study of the benefits of early childhood education is the High/Scope Perry Preschool Project. This long-term study of 123 disadvantaged black youths began in 1962 and is continuing today. At ages three and four, these children were divided into two groups, one group receiving high-quality preschool education and the other receiving no preschool education at all.

A number of variables were studied, including the children's abilities, attitudes, academic achievement, involvement in criminal behavior, participation in welfare programs and patterns of employability. The results through age 19 showed that those who received a quality preschool education completed high school at a higher rate, attended college or job-training programs more frequently, held down jobs at an increased rate, were arrested fewer times for criminal acts, and needed public assistance less frequently than those who did not receive such education (Weikart, 1989). A recent assessment of the students at age 27 concluded that the children who participated in the quality preschool program had fewer criminal arrests and earned more money than their disadvantaged counterparts. It is estimated that over these students' lives, $7.16 is saved for each dollar invested in preschool education (Smith, Fairchild, & Groginsky, 1995).

The Cost, Quality, and Child Outcomes in Childcare Centers study (1995) found that "children in higher quality preschool classrooms display greater receptive language ability and pre-mathematics skills, and have more advanced social skills than those in lower quality classrooms." The study also revealed that children in high quality preschool programs "have more positive self-perceptions and attitudes toward their childcare, and their teachers are more likely to have warm, open relationships with them." These factors all contribute to increased readiness for school (Cost, Quality, and Child Outcomes in Childcare Centers, 1995).

Aside from preparing children for future school years, well-documented research indicates that a number of other benefits can be reaped from high-quality

early educational experiences (Bridgman, 1989 and Smith, Fairchild & Groginsky, 1995):

- a safe and caring environment is provided for children;
- social problems like violence and delinquency among juveniles, teen-age pregnancy, welfare dependence and school failure are prevented;
- good health and nutritional practices are promoted;
- children's social, physical, emotional, cognitive, and psychological development is fostered;
- families are strengthed; and
- welfare recipients are given an opportunity to work, therefore becoming more self-sufficient.

A strong beginning is not only of concern to educators and parents, but to those in business and politics as well. Research indicates that "early childhood education is critical to the nation's future economic position because it provides members of the next generation of workers with a solid foundation of skills, competencies, attitudes and behaviors that will ensure their success in a more technology-based and competitive future economic environment" (Smith, Fairchild & Groginsky, 1995). In his 1992 address to the Nation's Governors, President Bush stated that, "By the year 2000, all children in America will start to school ready to learn." And one initiative central to the National Education Goals Panel's Goals for America's Children was the identification of the need to increase the investment in high quality early childhood education (Seefeldt and Galper, 1998).

BARRIERS TO HIGH-QUALITY EXPERIENCES

Poverty

Many of the problems facing today's children are a result of poverty. In 1994 it was reported that approximately 15 million United States children live in poverty, the largest number then in almost three decades. It is estimated that each year of poverty for these children is translated into cost to society at the rate of between $36 and $177 billion dollars in lower productivity and employment (Sherman, 1994).

Children who are born poor are at a greater risk of educational failure. According to Bowman (1994), most poor and minority children are at risk for developmental failure. She contends that this problem is exacerbated by the fact that conflict exists between behaviors valued at home and those valued by the school.

Children born to poor families are burdened with inadequate resources as well as the many other problems associated with poverty. It is estimated that a year of childcare for just one young child can cost a family $4,000 (CDF, 1997). The childcare that poor parents can obtain is inadequate at best—many of the childcare centers serving the poor function as babysitting services rather than instructional institutions.

Participation Rates

As if low quality among educational programs during these very impressionable years isn't troublesome enough, some youth never have the

opportunity to participate in programs at all. If finances do not prohibit them from attending, long waiting lists do. Usually the students who need the help the most are the ones who cannot afford it. Consequently, studies showed that only 45 percent of three- to five-year olds from low-income families were enrolled in early childhood programs, compared with 71 percent from their high-income counterparts (CDF, 1997).

The following chart shows the percentage of three- to five-year-olds enrolled in nursery school or kindergarten 1993, as determined by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. These statistics reveal that a large portion of children do not participate in early childhood programs.

All fifty states seem to be fairly comparable in the number of children receiving childcare services: the range from the smallest percentage to the largest is twenty-two points and all but four states are in the 50 to 69 percent range. This phenomenon may be due in part to the passage of the Family Support Act and At-Risk Childcare Legislation which requires that states match funds in order to receive federal money for subsidized childcare (Seefeldt and Galper, 1998). Before this legislation, the range in investment in early childhood education varied greatly from state to state. According to Adams and Sandfort (1992) state expenditures ranged from $0.24 per child in Idaho to more than $70 per child in

Region	Percent of Three- to Five-Year-Olds Enrolled in Nursery School or Kindergarten
Pacific Northwest – Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, Washington	56
Southwest: Arizona, California, Hawaii, Nevada, New Mexico, Texas,	58
Northwest: Colorado, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Utah, Wyoming	56
Midwest: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio, Wisconsin	60
Southeast: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee	59
Northeast: Delaware, District of Columbia, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, West Virginia	62
New England: Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Vermont	66

Alaska, Connecticut, Massachusetts, New York, and Vermont in fiscal year 1990 (Seefeldt and Galper, 1998).

While particular regions have similar percentages of students participating in early childhood programs, many areas of the country have few to no programs available to their youth. One study reported by the Children's Defense Fund (1997) indicated that nine out of fifty-five counties in West Virginia had no childcare centers. Other studies have shown that childcare is particularly scarce in low-income communities. The Department of Education has found that public schools in low-income communities were less likely (16 percent) to offer

preschool programs than their wealthier counterparts (approximately 33 percent). Similarly, only 33 percent of schools in low-income communities offered extended-day or enrichment programs, compared to 52 percent of wealthier schools (CDF, 1997).

Not only do financial burdens prohibit children from participating in preschool programs, many students are denied such education because the waiting lists are simply too long. Long waiting lists are not at all uncommon. In 1995, thirty-eight states and the District of Columbia had waiting lists comprised of low-income working families who needed childcare assistance. In 1995, Texas had more than 35,000 children on its waiting list, constituting a wait as long as two years. Florida's waiting list recently reached almost 28,000, the highest it has been since 1991. Illinois had approximately 20,000 students waiting in 1995, many of whom will never come off the waiting list because priority is given to students needing protective services and those with special needs (CDF, 1997).

Quality of Care

According to Seefeldt and Galper (1998), most children are likely to be in satisfactory childcare situations. Even so, there is research to indicate that the childcare offered to far too many children is at best inadequate and may even be harmful. All states fall short of providing quality childcare and education to all preschool students. In a study of fifty non-profit and fifty for-profit, randomly chosen childcare centers in California, Colorado, Connecticut, and North Carolina, researchers found that " only 1 in 7 centers provides a level of childcare

quality that promotes healthy development and learning" (Cost, Quality, and Child Outcomes in Childcare Centers, 1995). This translates into 86 percent of the centers receiving ratings of poor or mediocre. These findings are supported by data from *Who Cares? Childcare Teachers and the Quality of Care in America*, which indicates that many states do not measure up when it comes to commitment to quality childcare and education for young children (Whitebook, M., Howes, C. & Phillips, D., 1989). The report found that:

- Early education and childcare was a low priority for all states. Twenty-nine states spend less than 50 cents out of every $100 of state tax revenues on such programs. However, two-thirds of the states spend more than ten times that amount on corrections and prisons.

- The commitment to implement quality early education programs varies greatly from state to state. The ten states with the greatest commitment averaged an allotment of 4.5 times as much per child as the ten states with the smallest commitment.

- Commitment does not necessarily translate into investments in early childhood education. Kentucky, North Carolina, and Oklahoma were in the top third of states expressing commitment to quality early education in 1994, but were in the bottom third in personal income per capita. Nevada and Virginia, on the other hand, were in the bottom third in terms of financial commitment, but ranked eleventh and fourteenth, respectively, in personal income per capita.

In order to see gains for students and consequently for society as a whole, financial commitment must be increased. This means, among other things, that students from low-income families should have access to services that address not only educational issues, but social service concerns as well. Because children's health has a tremendous impact on their development and readiness to learn, a complete education must also include health and nutrition services.

Research also shows that high quality childcare is related to the staff-to-student ratio, the level of education of staff members, and teacher wages (Cost, Quality, and Child Outcomes in Childcare Centers, 1995 and Smith, Fairchild, & Groginsky, 1995). The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) recommends that an acceptable adult to child ratio for four- and five-year-olds is two adults with no more than than twenty children (Bredekamp, 1997). NAEYC also recommends in its Compensation Guidelines (1993) that programs offer staff salaries and benefits commensurate with the skills and qualifications required for specific roles to ensure the provision of quality services and the effective recruitment and retention of qualified, competent staff (Bredekamp, 1997).

CHALLENGES FOR THE FUTURE: PROVIDING A SAFE AND CARING ENVIRONMENT FOR OUR CHILDREN

The importance of a quality preschool education must become a priority. Research has shown that the quality of early childhood education impacts children's development and family relationships. The ultimate consequences of poor quality childcare services are too great. If we do not pay now, we will pay later in the building of prisons and the loss of human capital (Seefeldt and Galper, 1998). In order to rise above the mediocre childcare that is prevalent in most of America, we must insist on increased standards of quality.

Preschool children have different needs from older children and these needs should be considered if preschool programs are going to be superior. Koralek, Colker and Dodge discuss several key indicators of quality programs in their book, *The What, Why, and How of High-Quality Early Childhood Education: A Guide for On-Site Supervision*. First, the program should be based on practice that is " developmentally appropriate." Although the primary role of education is the child's intellectual development, such growth cannot occur without fostering the child's social, emotional, and physical development. NAEYC identifies two dimensions of developmentally appropriate practice (Day, 1994):

> 1. Age appropriateness. A predictable sequence of growth and development characterizes young children, and developmentally appropriate learning environments attend to what we know about how young children grow, develop, and learn.
>
> 2. Individual appropriateness. Developmentally appropriate practice affirms that each child is unique, with individual differences. Appropriate learning environments not only recognize the uniqueness, but also reflect individual differences in the curriculum and experiential learning experiences offered to each child.

Developmentally appropriate learning environments are based on the following principles (Day, 1994):

- Appropriate curriculum stimulates learning in all developmental areas: physical, social, emotional, and intellectual. Such a child-centered approach is at the heart of developmentally appropriate practice.

- Learning experiences are designed to support individual needs and differences. Developmental levels, learning styles, family backgrounds, and children's interests are among the factors that help formulate the learning environment. Differences among young children are evident, and these differences should not

only be acknowledged, but used as a guide to inform instruction.

- Learning experiences provide children with the opportunity to actively manipulate and explore materials. Hands-on learning strategies emphasize the acquisition of higher-order critical thinking skills as opposed to drill and rote memorization. Young children learn by doing. They learn through exploration and discovery, using all of their senses. The optimum learning environment promotes active participation and provides many opportunities for children to see, feel, hear, smell, taste, and touch.

- Curriculum is designed to provide children with choices of many concrete and relevant learning experiences. If learning is relevant for children, they are more likely to persist with a task and are more motivated to learn.

- Learning opportunities are presented predominately in learning centers, where children work individually and in small groups, as opposed to whole-group instruction.

- Learning is viewed as integrated, and opportunities to develop math, science, and literacy skills can occur simultaneously rather than in discrete segmented lessons. Units of study and topic work are used to present related and integrated curriculum. (NAEYC as cited in Day, 1994).

Another indicator of a quality preschool program is the degree to which the environment is safe and orderly. From making sure that play areas are free from hazardous materials to tending to the health and nutrition of the student, quality preschools concern themselves with issues of safety.

Koralek, Colker and Dodge also include in their list of recommendations the need for students to feel respected by their adult caretakers. Additionally, parent involvement helps to facilitate quality in the preschool program.

Extensive research into how young children learn dictates that the following elements should be fundamental to a preschool program (Day, 1994):

1. Throughout the preschool years, the curriculum should be presented in an integrated format rather than in 10- or 20-minute segments for each content area. Instruction should be planned around themes, with the themes being developed through learning centers in which the children are free to plan and select activities to support their individual learning experience.

2. Children in preschool should be engaged in active, rather than passive, learning activities. The curriculum must be seen as more than a program purchased from a publisher. Such a program should not dictate what learning is appropriate for a given child. The teacher should serve as a facilitator informing instruction for each individual.

3. Spontaneous play, either alone or with other children, is a natural way for young children to learn to deal with one another and to understand their environment. Play should be valued and included in the program plan.

4. Because children come to school with different knowledge, concepts, and experiences, it is important that new learning be connected to something that is known and relevant (NAESP as cited in Day, 1994).

If we are to change the state of affairs for children in America, we must begin with high-quality, developmentally appropriate educational opportunities. While all students should reap the benefits of such programs, special care should be given to those who are financially burdened. If we are to take students into the new millenium equipped to be successful in school, changes will have to be made in the number of students who receive early childhood educational services and the quality of the programs in which they participate. This goal will only become a reality through the implementation of programs that meet the criteria outlined in this paper.

16

References

American Psychological Association. (1993). *Violence and youth: Psychology's response, Vol. 1: Summary report of the American Psychological Association Commission on Violence and Youth,* Washington, D.C.: Author.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation. (1997). *Kids Count: State profiles* (On-line), Available: http://www.aecf.org/cig-bin

Bowman, B. (1994). The challenge of diversity. *Phi Delta Kappan, 76*(3).

Bredekamp, S. & Copple. C. (1997*). Developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood programs.* Washington, D.C.: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Bridgman, A. (1989). *Early childhood education and childcare: Challenges and opportunities for America's public schools.* Virginia: American Association of School Administrators.

Children's Defense Fund. (1997). *The state of America's children yearbook.* Washington D.C.: Author.

← good comparisons for proposal

Cost, Quality and Child Outcomes in Childcare Centers. (1995*). Executive summary.* University of Colorado at Denver.

Day, B. (1994). *Early childhood education: Developmental/experiential teaching and learning.* (4th ed.). New York: Macmillan College Publishing Company.

Koralek, D.G., Colker, L.J, & Dodge, D.T. (1995). *The what, why, and how of high-quality early childhood education: A guide for on-site supervision.* Washington, D.C: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

National Education Goals Panel. (1993). *Building a nation of learners: The national education goals report: Executive summary.* Washington, D.C.: Author.

Seefeldt, C. & Galper, A. (1998). *Continuing issues in early childhood education.* New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc.

Sherman, A. (1994). *Wasting America's future: The Children's Defense Fund report on the costs of child poverty.* Boston, MA: Beacon Press Books.

Smith, S.L., Fairchild, M. & Groginsky, S. (1995). *Early childhood care and education: An investment that works.* Washington, D.C.: National Conference of State Legislatures.

Weikert, D.P. (1989). *Quality preschool programs: A long-term social investment.* New York: Ford Foundation Project on Social Welfare and the American Future, Occasional Paper Number Five.

Whitebook, M., Howes, C. & Phillips, D. (1989). *Who cares? Childcare teachers and the quality of care in America: Final report, National childcare staffing study.* Oakland, CA: Childcare Employee Project.

Willer, B. and Bredekamp, S. (1990). Redefining readiness: An essential requisite for educational reform. *Young Children*, 5, 22-24.

Child Care + Early Intervention
short - of effectiveness of Early Childhood Prog

Brain Development: what does it mean 1997 - NACY

H/S - Costs Benefits of Prevention
charts -

Costs & quality Study - Benefits of Quality Care

Child Poverty figures - US leads the world.
see Sherman for impact of poverty on children

Annie Casey stats on # of children in K + pre K

16